

May 2012 Book Reviews

Michael at the Invasion of France 1943

By Laurie Calkhoven

Calkhoven has again written a high interest, fast paced, with a historical setting book that will be enjoyed by readers 6th grade and up. Michael, who is 12, lives in Paris as the Nazis invade France. His older brother has been captured and is in a German POW camp and his father is in England, thus leaving Michael to care for his mother and little sister. The author has captured in word the hunger, cold, and desperation that most French people experienced during World War II. Based on facts of the French resistance Calkhoven has woven a story of fiction telling of the children that helped to guide Allied pilots to safe houses so that they can escape and continue to fly missions against Hitler. Michael is constantly on the look-out for the Gestapo who are always trying to identify the resistance cells. The book will keep the reader turning pages to read of the missions Michael makes and how he keeps one step ahead of the enemy. The participants of the resistance are true soldiers as they put their lives on the line time and time again. Another volume in the series "Boys of Wartime" this is a great book for the male reluctant reader, but will appeal to any avid reader.

Pat Thompson, WSC

The Not-So-Great Depression

By Amy Goldman Koss

Jacki is a ninth grade girl who hates to play the piano and to go out for track, because she knows Coach Keefer has it in for her. Her mother is a hard charging business woman who thinks more of her business appointments than her family. Her mother and father are divorced and her dad is enjoying a slower life style living with his mother and learning to be a baker. When mother loses her job the nanny, gardener, and large family house must go. The main character, Jacki, tells the story as everyone in the family is impacted by the crisis. The story is easy to read and told as a ninth grade person might tell it. This book talks about the financial crisis in a family and how the change affects each person in a different way. Members of the family realize that some of the things which they felt were essential and were taken for granted were not that necessary after all. The characters in the story had to stop thinking of themselves to begin thinking of what was best for the entire family. This book is very timely for 2012 and well written for the teen age reader.

Kathy Muller

Breakfast in the Rainforest

By Richard Sobol

This is a first person narrative with beautiful photographs of endangered gorillas. Quite a journey through Africa to see and learn about gorillas. This book is recommended for grades 6-8 and for any library collection.

Kristy Wittler

Drizzle

By Kathleen Van Cleve

Polly Peabody lives on Rupert's Rhubarb Farm, a combination adventure park, scientific research site, and magical place where the plants and insects communicate with certain humans. When the rains, which fall every Monday at one o'clock, stop falling when Grandmom dies, the family is in danger of losing the farm. Polly decides to find out the mysteries of the farm in order to save it for the family. This book is recommended for grades 4-6 and any library collection. Some special features of this book are the child drawn map of the farm and chapter headings with the date and time. The main character in this book has problems finding friends and believing in her own abilities. When she stops doubting herself and being afraid, she realizes that she has friends and that she can do many things as long as she stays focused and positive about herself and tries.

Kathy Muller

The Unseen World of Poppy Malone: A Gaggle of Goblins

By Suzanne Harper

Dad and mom go where the ghosts are so Poppy and her siblings, Franny, Will, and Rolly are forever being drug from one place to the next. They have a hard time making friends because of what their parents do. Now Poppy, the scientist, is seeing goblins. She is sure it is her imagination but as many strange things seem to occur and she continues to see and hear goblins she becomes determined to prove they exist. Now the goblins have replaced mischievous brother Rolly with one of their own. Poppy, with the help of Franny and Will, who are both, skeptical, they go in search of their brother. This book is recommended for grades 3-5. There is a lot of rambling about Mom and Dad searching for the Dark Presence and another scientist that mom thinks is wonderful and dad is not too thrilled with but they really have nothing to do with the story. It would seem this is just fluff to lengthen the story. It adds nothing to the story only managing to drag it out. If you read the first couple of chapters and then skip to the fourteenth chapter you will have an enjoyable read.

Diane Limoges

Winnie Finn, Worm Farmer

By Carol Brendler

Meet Winnie Finn, who loves earthworms, she adores earthworms and would love to take them to the fair. Unfortunately there isn't a category to put them under. What to do, what to do? She talks to her neighbors, there's Mr. Abernathy, he's going to take his corn, and Mrs. Yamasaki-O'Sheridan who has wonderful chickens and eggs, or how about Mr. Peasely who raises puppies. Read this wonderful book to find out how Winnie helps all of them, makes some money and buys that new red wagon she wants to badly. This book is recommended for readers in grades K-3rd.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

Almost Zero

By Nikki Grimes

When Dymone sees Tameeka's pink high top's and finds out they also come in red she just has to have them. When she demands that her mom purchase them for her it back fires and her mom takes all her clothes away. Now she is forced to wear the same clothing three days in a row after hand washing them in the bathroom sink. Can her life get much worse? But when a classmate loses everything in a fire Dymone has a new found concept of what going without is really like and she makes it her mission to help Isabel and her family out. This book is recommended for grades 2-4. Here is a fun book that young girls will enjoy as well as learning one of life's little lessons in the process.

Diane Limoges

The Cupcake Queen

By Heather Helper

Manhattan raised Penny and her mom, move to the Hog's Hollow and open a cupcake bakery. It's bad enough that she has to start over in a new school and make new friends but the worst is the fact that dad has not moved with them. To make matters worse her mom is not telling Penny anything so she has no idea what is going on with her parents or how it will affect her. The bright spot in all this is a cute boy, Marcus. Now if she can only figure out where she stands with him maybe Hog's Hollow won't be so bad. This book carries an Accelerated Reader level of 4.4 and is recommended for grades 7 and up. We have a winner. A well told story of dealing with divorce, making new friends and finding love. Here is an accelerated title that young readers will enjoy picking up.

Diane Limoges

Instructions

By Neil Gaiman

This book is written by a storyteller who guides you through a house and mystical land with mystical creatures in an instruction type format. The pictures are nice, sort of chalk like, with surprises going on around the story and the main character. This is a different sort of book with a different story line. Not everyone would care for it. This book is recommended for grades Pre K- 2nd.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

There's a Train Out for Dreamland

By Frederick Heider and Carl Kress

Come along, hop aboard, let's take a trip on the Dreamland Express. It's a delightful concoction, a trip with the rails made out of peppermint. The mountainside is made from different candy and the giraffe is made out of jellybeans. The story is a spinoff of a song written in 1947. Enjoy! This book is recommended for grades Pre K-2nd.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

Slow Down for the Manatees

By Arnosky

How much do you know about a manatee? These large animals have one natural enemy, boaters who don't see them and accidentally hitting and hurting or killing them. When this happens and if they are found soon enough others come with heavy equipment and move them to a refuge where they are placed in aquarium, and when she was healed she is taken back to the stream where she lived with her calf. This book is recommended for Pre K-3rd.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

Chickens Go To Town

By Leslie Helakoski

This is a delightful book with adorable pictures about these big fat hens who had scrambled in the back of Farmer's pickup for a little snack when the truck took off down the road. When they get to town they are thrown out of the truck and they are on their own. Crossing the street, meeting others and the rest of their misadventures are humorous to the young reader. For a few fun minutes read this enjoyable book. This book is recommended for grades Pre K-2nd.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

What's the Big Idea Molly?

By Valeri Gorbachev

Whatever will they do? No one can think of a birthday present for Turtle. But Molly comes up with a clever idea and when all the friends work together, Rabbi, Pig, Goose, and Frog, they make the most wonderful present imaginable. The color pencil drawings are original and add much to the story. This would be a good story time book and is recommended for grades 1st-4th.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

The Sky is Everywhere

By Jandy Nelson

A 17 year old girl loses her older sister and her life suddenly morphs into her sister's life. This is another "steamy" novel for teenage girls. The storyline would be an excellent story- but why must we fill the story with so many X rated tales. This book is recommended for High School readers and any library collection.

Kristy Wittler

Blueberry Girl

By Neil Gaiman

A mother's prayers, wishes and dreams for her unborn baby girl are the focus of this book. This is not really a picture book even though it looks like one. It's a picture book for mothers. This book is a prayer for a little girl not yet born and what the future holds for her! The illustrations

and the print are unique features in this book. This book is recommended for mothers and for any public library collection.

Kristy Wittler

Dick and Jane and Vampires

By Laura Marchesani

I don't think this book is appropriate for school but may be for the public library. This is humor for adults. What child would get it? The illustrations are good and capture the character of Dick and Jane. This book is recommended for grades 7-12 but they don't know who Dick and Jane are, so there is no point. This book is not appropriate for children in any way, shape or form! Three young, innocent children come in contact with a supernatural creature who receives nourishment by drinking blood. The vampire has access to their playground and house. Adults do not notice the danger. The children find a girlfriend for the lonely vampire and they all live happily ever after? Children do not know who Dick and Jane are. There are many cute and appropriate books to share in October or pre-Halloween. This is not one of them! Even the cover is creepy! We do NOT want to send the message to children, if you see a creepy gentleman hanging around the park or your home, he is probably just lonely—so be his friend. In today's world we have to keep children safe. SAY NO, RUN AWAY, REPORT TO AN ADULT YOU KNOW—is the only message to give. We don't read *To Kill A Mockingbird* to Elementary students. Boo Radley cannot be understood at that age. This book belongs with adult collectors of the Dick and Jane series or in a public library in the adult section.

LeNell Quinn, Winside Public School

Alex Rider, Crocodile Tears

By Anthony Horowitz

Fresh off a dangerous spy caper, Alex Rider is inadvertently caught up in another. Fourteen-year-old Alex is in Scotland during Christmas break and through a friend and her father is invited to the castle of the Reverend Desmond McCain. Reverend McCain is a born again Christian who served time in jail. He runs a respectable disaster aid organization and everyone thinks he is now a stand up guy which he is not. He is planning to create a natural disaster in Africa, using genetic engineering with plants, solicit donations to help with the disaster, and then pocket the money for himself. Alex becomes aware of all of this. Will his involvement help stop this plot? Will Alex be ok? This fourteen-year-old school boy turned spy will keep your attention. This book is recommended for Junior High readers and any library that is looking for adventure books. This is the first book in the Alex Rider series I have read and I can understand why Mr. Horowitz is a bestselling author with these books. Alex is a fourteen-year-old James Bond complete with spy gadgets and the knack for getting out of tight spots. It might appeal more to boys than girls but there is certainly plenty of action. Some of it seems a little farfetched for a fourteen-year-old boy but isn't that part of the allure of reading. There is definitely some violence in the book and therefore maybe not appropriate for younger children. If I was in middle school to junior high I would love to read all the books in the series.

Deb Daehnke

Trapped – Vet Volunteers

By Laurie Halse Anderson

Brenna is one of the youth who work at Dr. Mac's veterinary animal clinic. One day in the woods she finds a dog that has been caught in a steel animal trap and enlists the help of her brother Sage to bring the dog to the clinic. But now what does she do? Sage belongs to an animal rights group and he is looking at an extreme way to punish the person who set the trap. And when Brenna meets the young man who set the trap, she realizes that people do things for a variety of reasons, sometimes because they have no other choice. This book is recommended for grades 3-5 and any type of library. This is a fun series to read. It's a fun book and an easy read for reluctant readers that should appeal to both boys and girls. The author presents an idea and gives facts which should encourage the reader to think about the situation and consequences, in this case, the use of steel traps to catch animals.

Deb Daehnke

Earth Feeling the Heat

By Brenda Z. Guiberson

This is a book that shows the effects of global warming on species throughout the world. The organization and illustrations are good. It's good for geography, but since it states global warming as a fact, which some would contend, is not a fact, one might want to consider using it in a classroom unless you're going to delve into the controversy. This book is for elementary students.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

In the Pocket: Johnny Unitas and Me

By Mike Leonetti

This is a story of a boy in the 50's who loves football and is a Colts fan. He's attending the Championship game in New York City and goes through all the history of his team and especially his favorite quarterback, Johnny Unitas. In the meantime, he works hard at his own goal to be a quarterback on his rec team at home. Boys in elementary school who love sports will love this book. Illustrations and story are good. This book is recommended for a public collection.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Trick or Treat Marley!

By John Grogan

This is a classic Marley tale. In this book, Marley makes a mess of Halloween decorating for a party, but saves the day when it's time to trick or treat. The illustrations are colorful in the typical Marley style...I wanted to wipe the pumpkin seeds and goo off the poor dog! This book is recommended for dog lovers of any age, but especially good for preschool and early elementary students and any collection.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Li'l Rabbit's KWANZAA

By Donna L. Washington

This is the story of a little bunny who wants to help his Granna with Kwanzaa but can't really find his place. He shares his dream with others around him though, and in the end, he drums up quite the celebration. It's a cute story and gives some good info about KWANZAA with more info on the last couple pages for curious readers. This is recommended for early elementary students and any collection.

The Duck and the Kangaroo

By Jane Wattenberg

This is an interesting story. The most interesting things are the illustrations which depict scores of Australian animals. The story itself is a rhyming frolic, but kind of unrealistic. That bothered my little listeners. This book is recommended for early elementary students and public collections.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Chicken Big

By Keith Graves

This is a bit of a takeoff of Chicken Little...at first, but ends up being the story of a really big chick who's trying to fit in and his coup-mates who just aren't sure what to do with him. In the end, he's helpful and kind and endears himself to the flock. I think the subtle lesson about returning people's unintentional comments with kindness and hanging in there, is the best thing here. The illustrations are kind of comic book type and the text is predictable making this a good one for early elementary students. This book could be a good addition to any collection.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE